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LETTER DATED 23 AUGUST 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a statement issued on 22 August 1996 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea concerning the situation in the Lesser Hanish islands in the Red Sea.

(Signed) Amdemicae KAHSAI
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement of 22 August 1996 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea on the situation in the Lesser Hanish islands

It is to be recalled that a French delegation led by Ambassador Francis Gutmann arrived in Asmara on 18 August 1996 and thoroughly discussed the misunderstandings that have arisen due to the recent circumstances in the Lesser Hanish islands. The Government of Eritrea expressed its appreciation to the delegation for the prompt initiative taken and the concern shown by the Government of France.

In the talks that ensued, the Government of Eritrea was not provided with convincing evidence to refute the presence of its units on the islands, both before and after the 21 May 1996 Agreement of Principles. However, the smooth progress of the arbitration being the main issue of concern to it, the Government of Eritrea saw no possible advantage in dwelling at length to clarify the veracity of the matter. As a matter of fact, it consciously avoided being locked in such wrangling and assured the French delegation that it would evacuate its units from the Lesser Hanish islands within a short time. This decision was officially transmitted by a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea, on 18 August 1996.

While these measures of patience and restraint were exercised by the Government of Eritrea in the interest of peace and security in the region, they have been reciprocated by irresponsible acts of provocation by the Government of Yemen. On the morning of 19 August 1996, Yemeni troops using two fast boats came close to the shore of the Lesser Hanish islands and fired shots at our forces. In the afternoon of the same day, more Yemeni troops using seven boats passed along the shores of the islands. In both instances, our forces refrained from responding in a similar manner.

The Government of Eritrea is well aware of the aims behind these sinister provocations by the Government of Yemen. Despite that, it opted to take a unilateral decision to evacuate from Lesser Hanish in order to ensure that the arbitration process is not hampered and to avoid getting immersed in unnecessary wrangling. At this juncture, the Government of Eritrea would like to put the above-mentioned and other incessant negative behaviour of the Yemeni Government on record and call upon the Security Council to pay due attention to the matter.